

# FOTO

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# REDUX

*Morris Rosenfeld's old chase boat is an ultimate collectable. When Ed Cutts bought her, she was a wreck. Look at her now.*

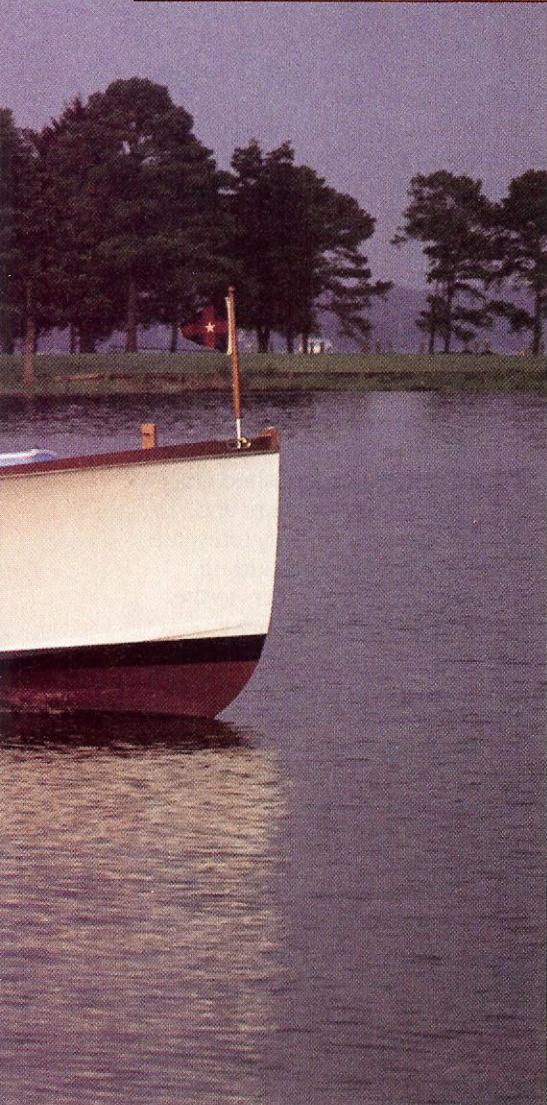
*by Roger Vaughan*





*Foto's wheel is original. The handsome Nevins binnacle is a new addition.*

*photographs by Eric Poggenpohl*



**T**hat we have such a glorious photographic record of American yachting from the turn of the century to the 1950s, when cameras became more user-friendly, is due in great part to Morris Rosenfeld & Sons. The late Morris Rosenfeld, a natural talent who took an award-winning photograph when he was 13, was running a photography studio with a staff of 14 in Manhattan by 1915. His bread-and-butter was advertising work, but his major visual obsession was boats. By 1920, he had purchased a chase boat and was regularly photographing the racing fleets on Long Island Sound.

By the mid-1920s, Rosenfeld was thinking about a new boat, something faster and more maneuverable to keep up with the grand, fast vessels he was photographing. He commissioned Frederick Lord, a naval

architect and amateur photographer, to design a chase boat for him.

"Frederick Lord designed many of the Gold Cup racers of the day," Morris' son Stanley Rosenfeld says. "He did V-bottom hulls with fine lines. Weight distribution was critical. We realized halfway through the building process that *Foto* had no head. We mentioned this to Lord. He suggested we use a bucket to avoid weight in the bow. After much persuasion, he agreed to install a head.

"Lord was a meticulous bachelor and a frequent visitor at home. Once when he left he said to Mother that he could always tell if a woman was a good housekeeper. Then he ran his fingers along the sill above the door. My mother never looked at his fingers, but I know she gave him a cooler reception after that."

Lord drew plans for a 33-footer, a slim, angular boat with an eight-foot beam. It was built at the Kanno yard on City Island, New York, in 1928. On his regular visits to the yard, Frederick Lord would always pick up a broom and sweep up the shavings and chips under the boat. "He couldn't understand," Stanley recalls, "how people could work in such a mess."

At the launching in 1929 Morris Rosenfeld christened his new boat *Foto*, and the legend began. The distinguished, lean profile of the boat, its compact bow-on image, and its innovative, flared deck that carried aft to the transom soon became a familiar sight along the East Coast. More than one race committee was heard to remark at the sight of *Foto* speeding toward them, "Wait for Rosy." With good reason. When a boat owner saw *Foto* coming his way he would quickly make sure every-thing was shipshape, because that photograph would be for the record: it would be a Rosenfeld.

"It was an excellent boat for our purposes," says Stanley, who did the majority of driving for his father. "It had an oversized rudder and was very responsive. With one hand on the throttle and one hand on the wheel, you had great control. It had a large prop and would accelerate rapidly. You could really move it around. In a seaway, going slowly, a wave



*View of the cockpit, looking forward, with new white mahogany sole, fresh paint and varnish, and wicker furniture in place.*

*Chase boat courtesy of Crockett Brothers.*

would pick the boat up and it would start to broach. But a shot of throttle would control the stern no matter how big the waves. It was a good boat upwind and down.”

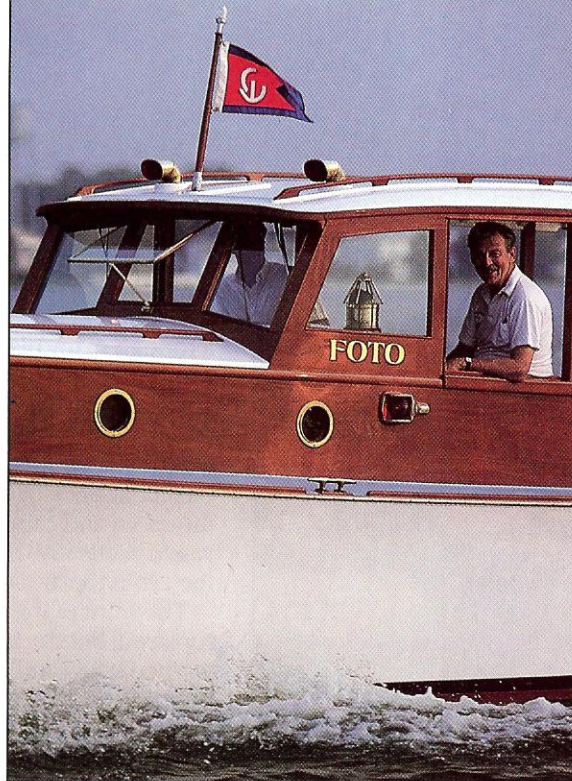
Among the crowd of *Foto*'s admirers was a fellow named Ed Cutts, now 60, who spent a boat-crazed adolescence in Queens County, Long Island. Cutts remembers seeing *Foto* going up the Sound “like a rocket” when he was a teenager. “Morris would be sitting in the back with a cigar,” Cutts says, “or with his arm wrapped around the post for the cabin top, shooting. They would leave City Island when the Sound was in a lather, no other boats out, go to Newport to shoot, and come back the same day. It was the best damn boat around, better than many of the boats Rosenfeld was shooting.”

When Cutts was 20, dating a girl named Maggie, whom he would later marry, he had a brush with *Foto* he still remembers. “We were out sailing a West Coast Mercury, an 18-footer, and here came the 400-foot paddle-wheeler that took passengers from Manhattan to Rye, New York. We had the angle on her, and I decided it would be fun to jump the wake of this monster. I got into the maelstrom behind the boat and all hell broke loose. Suddenly *Foto* appeared with Stanley driving and Morris shooting, both of them yelling at each other. I'd give anything to find that picture.”

Cutts went on to be a wooden boat designer and builder of considerable renown, as well as pilot, motorcycle enthusiast, and inventor. His respect for nautical history was deeply ingrained at an early age, and his memory, especially for a trim set of lines, has always been remarkable. He didn't forget about *Foto*. In fact he began keeping track of her from afar. “I decided when I was a kid I wanted that boat,” Cutts says.

Morris Rosenfeld died in 1968. Along with two brothers and a sister, Stanley had been conscripted into his father's studio as a young man. The others drifted into other occupations, but Stanley persevered under less than ideal circumstances. Morris was a jealous man who took credit for photographs shot by anyone in his studio. And following in the career footsteps of a legend who also happens to be your father is a tough act, one that Stanley accomplished gracefully, and with his own talent and identity intact. So for nearly ten years he kept *Foto* for his own, adding more distinguished chapters to the family's photographic history of yachting.

In 1976, Stanley found himself tied up with business, travel, and caring for his late wife, Ruth, who was terminally ill. He wasn't using *Foto* much anymore, the boat wasn't in good shape, and he thought about getting rid of it—literally. “I thought I should sink it,” Stanley said recently. “I mentioned that to Ruth one day when we were on the boat. She said I shouldn't do it—it was part of the family.”



*Ed Cutts at Foto's helm during sea trials following a five-year restoration.*

Gordon Colley, who was captain of New York Yacht Club commodore Donald Kipp's *Ballerina*, had often expressed interest in the boat. "He said he would take care of it, put it in shape, keep it forever," Stanley says. Stanley sold Colley the boat for a dollar, even paid for its transportation to Clarkshill Lake near Augusta, Georgia, with the understanding that he could charter it back for the America's Cup summer of 1977 (there has been a Rosenfeld photographing every America's Cup since 1920—including the most recent 1988 Cup in San Diego). But it didn't happen.

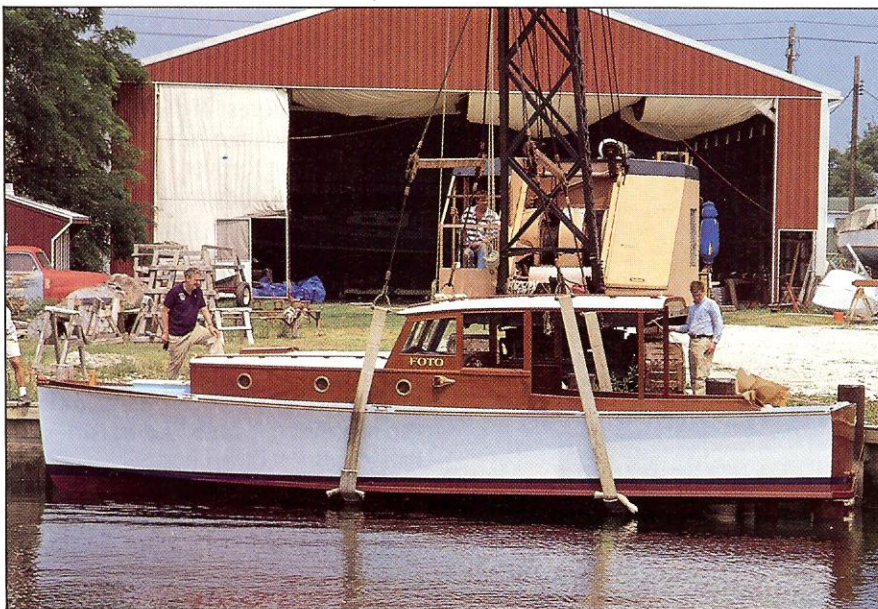
Stanley lost track of the boat for several years. "I heard rumors that Colley had raced it around, opened it up and that it sank at the dock. I couldn't even talk about it. I never knew what happened to it or where it was until I heard Ed Cutts had it."

Ed Cutts knew Gordon Colley. Every time he saw Colley, he would inquire about *Foto*, casually of course. Like horse traders and poker players, boat nuts know enthusiasm can be quickly measured in dollars. But Cutts played it a little too cool. Once when he inquired about *Foto* Colley told him it had been sold. "He said it was shot, he'd let some guy have it. I couldn't believe it. I always told him I liked it *very* much, you know, I didn't want to jack the price, but he should have known."

The new owner was a man named Larry Smalley, who also kept *Foto* on Clarkshill Lake. Smalley paid \$2500 for the boat. It was a wreck, but the engine—a 235-hp Chevrolet that Stanley had put in the boat before he let Colley have it—was like new. Like Colley, Smalley's intention was to refit the boat. Disappointed, Cutts didn't begin looking for Smalley until 1985, when a group from the New York Yacht Club financed the Mystic Seaport Museum's million-dollar purchase of the Rosenfeld Collection. The acquisition made big news in the yachting community, and Cutts moved quickly before the reverberations had an effect on the price of *Foto*, the boat from which most of the pictures (estimates run well over a million images) were shot.

*View below looking forward. Cutts kept the look spare while adding elegance. The boat is an upgraded period piece.*





*Foto shows her angular, no-nonsense profile and full-length hard chines as she bits the water. Ed Cutts is at the bow, son Eddie watches the stern, while son Ron drives the crane.*

Cutts began calling all the Smalleys listed in the Augusta phonebook until he found the one with the boat, told him he was interested in buying. Larry Smalley said it was a great boat, never anything like it. He said you didn't drive it, you thought it along. He said he'd sell, but it wasn't in very good shape. Cutts told him he had a little boatyard and could fix it.

Cutts flew to Augusta with his son, Eddie Jr. "Foto was as rickety as the dock it was at," Cutts says. "There were holes in the deck as big as my

dog. The cabin was being used to store cushions, cabinets, and bunks from Smalley's old Chris Craft, and sheets of plywood he planned to nail on the deck, so Foto was down on her marks. To most people it would have looked beyond saving. Smalley said he had the engine running so we could take a spin. I couldn't believe it. The bilge was full of water. When Eddie stepped on the deck his foot went through.

"The gas in the tank was very old and the engine was missing, but off we went. At 2200 rpm we could have water-skied behind the boat. Even overloaded, the boat made almost square turns and left a clean wake. I looked over the stern and the top of the strut was wobbling. Foto always had that wobbly strut. Not any more."

Back ashore, Cutts and Smalley agreed on a price. Smalley said to send a check with the truck when it came to collect the boat. No way, Cutts said. He produced a piece of scrap paper, scribbled out a bill of sale, and gave Smalley a check on the spot. He wanted no second thoughts.

Cutts worked with care to retain as much of the original Foto as possible. Bow and stern towing bits of white oak were turned end-for-end and fitted with new locust pins. When new

holes for the head and the depth sounder were cut, the hull lumber was found in excellent shape, although many planks had to be teased back into fairness. Aside from six frames that were broken during the trucking process, the frames were stout. And while deck beams and the old cedar deck had to be replaced, the cabin and cabin top were salvaged. Cutts says 300 hours went into the cabin top alone.

The front of the cabin had to be replaced, but the sides, which had warped badly and settled, were saved. Cutts' crew made longitudinal circular-saw cuts every inch or so along the face of the cabin sides. Then they carefully straightened the planks, braced them with interior knees, filled the saw cuts, and epoxied new mahogany veneer to the face. The painstaking work went on for nearly five years whenever Cutts could spare the manpower. It was not a restoration for amateurs, or the faint of heart.

Plywood had been applied liberally to cover a multitude of sins on the boat, often with house nails that split everything they penetrated. Cutts put down floors of white mahogany in the cockpit and below, added new brass "bullet" running lights, and a Nevins two-thirds binnacle he found disguised as a lamp in a City Island junk shop. He removed a lead-lined refrigerator, and generally lightened the boat by 1000 pounds.

Lots of bleach was used to clean up Foto's wheel on all but the king spoke, which is as black as Cutts found it. "I realized when I was bleaching the wheel that that spoke was blackened by Stanley's sweat from all those years of driving for his father, who was always yelling at him — 'More to the left, Stanley; faster, Stanley.' I couldn't bear to purge Stanley's mark from the boat."

As you can see from the photographs on these pages, Foto looks like new, undoubtedly better than new. "Foto never got a fair shake," Cutts says. "She was used and abused. She had a right to be a lady once in her life, so at age 60, we've made her young again. That's more than you can do for yourself."



FOTO

OXFORD, MD.